



Polio Survivors Break Through Medical Barriers

AFTER SPENDING decades off the medical radar, Australia's tens of thousands of polio survivors are finally being acknowledged by the AMA as seen in an Australian Medicine Online item (16 July 2012) under the heading "*Polio sufferers going undiagnosed*".

This revelation is the result of a paper which was recently released by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing following a public Roundtable Forum on the Late Effects of Polio (LEOP) and Post-Polio Syndrome (PPS) in March 2012.

The "*Discussion paper on the late effects of polio/post-polio syndrome*" has been tabled in the House. An allocation of time will be sought for parliamentarians to speak to the paper when the House resumes sitting in August, most likely scheduled for 20 August 2012.

At the March Roundtable Forum, Polio Australia, a not-for-profit support organisation for polio survivors throughout the country, called for major investments into training the medical and allied health professions so they can effectively identify and treat LEOP and PPS.

Polio Australia President, Gillian Thomas, herself a survivor, said: "*We are very impressed with the depth of understanding that comes through the Discussion Paper and believe the three specific Recommendations made by the Committee are fully in accordance with Polio Australia's goal to alleviate the barriers faced by Australia's post polio community.*"

There were three significant recommendations outlined in the Discussion paper and the AMA's Australian Medicine Online article observed that:

The Committee said one of the factors making it hard to accurately gauge the prevalence of late effects polio and post-polio syndrome was that they were difficult to diagnose – a problem exacerbated by the lack of clear diagnostic tests and limited awareness among health professionals of the conditions.

The discussion paper said that early diagnosis was essential if patients were to derive the greatest benefit from treatment, but this was hampered by lack of a definitive diagnostic test.

It heard evidence from sufferers that many had been misdiagnosed with chronic fatigue syndrome, and reported that "many people living with LEOP/PPS continue to experience frustration, often waiting years to receive the correct diagnosis".

As two of its major goals are to enhance the health care available to polio survivors and to increase the knowledge level of the LEOP/PPS within the medical profession, Polio Australia congratulates the AMA for introducing these recommendations to its members.

Ms Thomas added, "*In the meantime, Polio Australia and the State Polio Networks will continue to do what we can within our limited human and financial resources for the health and wellbeing of Australia's significant post polio community.*"

FURTHER READING

- The "*Discussion paper on the late effects of polio/post-polio syndrome*": http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House_of_Representatives_Committees?url=haa/leop%20pps/media.htm
- The Medicine Online article can be viewed here: <http://ausmed.ama.com.au/node/3537>
- Further information on Polio Australia's views can be viewed online here: http://www.polioaustralia.org.au/?page_id=10491

FOR MEDIA INTERVIEW/PHOTO OPPORTUNITIES

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